



HAWAII STATE
DEPARTMENT
OF HEALTH

HOME OR BUILDING FLOODED!??

Take These Precautions Before Getting Back Into Your Home or Business

Never assume that a water-damaged house is safe. Going into a building that has been flooded, even after the water is gone, can present a wide variety of hazards that can cause injury, illness or even death. **Do not allow children in the home** after the flood or while it is being cleaned, inspected or repaired.

Watch out for these dangers:

Electrical hazards - Do not enter a flooded or wet building if the power is on. If any electrical circuits have gotten wet, get the power turned off at the main breaker or fuse box and leave it off until the electrical wiring or equipment has been inspected and repaired by a licensed electrician and approved by your local building inspector. (Call the Honolulu City and County Building Department at 527-6308, the Big Island Public Works Dept. at 961-8632, the Maui Public Works at 270-7375, or the Kauai Public Works at 241-6655). If power lines are down, or exterior connections servicing the building or home are damaged, call Hawaiian Electric Company-HECO at 548-7961 on Oahu, call Maui Electric Co-MECO at 871-7777, for Lanai and Molokai call 1-877-871-8461, for Big Island call HELCO at 969-6666, and on Kauai call 246-8200)

Structural damage - Do not enter a building if the framing or foundation is damaged. Contact your local building inspector for a safety inspection.

Hazardous materials - Dangerous materials that might be found in flooded homes or businesses include pesticides, fuel oil, gasoline, chemicals and other substances that might have been used or caused to be released by the flood.

Biological hazards - Bacteria, viruses, molds and mildew can cause illness when you breathe them in or take them into your body through your mouth or through a cut in the skin. Bacteria or viruses may be left indoors by floodwater, while mold and mildew may grow indoors after the floodwater has receded.

Before going back to live in your home, Take these steps:

GET HELP!! Before you disturb or remove materials that may be hazardous, take precautions to prevent exposure. If there is a noticeable chemical odor and/or a spilled container of a hazardous material in the building, call the fire department for help. If there is asbestos or lead paint in the building, call the Department of Health's Noise Radiation and Indoor Air Quality Branch at 586-4700.

Get the mess out. Remove all floodwater, dirt, and debris left behind by the floodwater.

Remove mold and mildew. Moldy or mildewed building materials should be thoroughly cleaned and dried or removed and replaced. Any materials or furnishings that soaked up water should be removed from the building.

Check your flooring. Carpet and padding cannot be cleaned well enough to prevent mold and mildew from growing. Throw them away.

Dry out walls. Walls must remain open to allow them to completely dry. Plaster, brick and concrete block walls can probably be cleaned, disinfected and completely dried.

Salvage what you can. Personal property and furnishings that are moist or wet 24 hours after floodwater recedes will have mold growing in or on them. Clothing and linens may be salvaged by washing with chlorine bleach and detergent.

Discard porous materials that cannot be laundered and disinfected.

Clean and dry the right way

Wet down mold. Before you touch, move, or clean moldy or mildewed materials, wet the mold with a soapy solution from a spray bottle to prevent the mold from getting into the air. Do this even if the material is already wet because the mold probably won't be wet. Remember that mold can still make you sick even after you have sprayed disinfectants (mold/mildew removers) to kill it.

Nonporous materials (materials that don't soak up water) and furnishings and other surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned, disinfected and allowed to dry completely. A liquid chlorine bleach solution (one cup bleach to one gallon water) should be used to disinfect and kill any remaining mold and mildew. Follow the instructions on the label and let the bleach solution remain on the surface for at least 15 minutes before rinsing and drying. After cleaning and disinfecting, you must completely dry each item or mold and mildew will return. To speed drying, keep fresh air circulating.

Stay safe while you work:

Wear a hard hat and safety goggles,

Wear the right gloves,

Wear rubber boots or hard-soled boots,

Wear a face mask. Read and follow the instructions on the mask package. Remember that the masks are disposable and should be thrown away at the end of the day, look for a mask with "NIOSH" approval and an N-95 rating.

Stay alert. Accidents happen when people are tired. Take the breaks you need, and drink plenty of fluids (bottled water, juice, soft drinks) to avoid dehydration. Never drink alcohol when you are working in a flooded building.

Protect yourself from bacteria and viruses. To keep from getting sick, wear rubber gloves while working; do not eat, drink, or smoke in the house; and wash your hands frequently with soap.

Get treated. If you get a cut or a puncture wound that is exposed to sewage, floodwater, or the dirt it leaves behind, see a doctor.